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STATE FOR G, DRL/SEA, AND NEA/IPA  
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC/DEMOC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/16/2017  
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IL](#)  
SUBJECT: EMBASSY RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR INPUT ON  
PRESIDENT'S HUMAN RIGHTS ROUNDTABLE AT 2007 UNGA

REF: 125456

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (B) and (d).

¶1. (U) Israel is a well-established democracy with a large number of influential NGOs and human rights activists. Human rights are guaranteed in a series of "Basic Laws," which function as a constitution. The government's treatment of NGOs is consistent with the 2006 Guiding Principles on NGOs. As such, most of our outreach on the Freedom Agenda is focused on promoting the functional integration of Israeli minorities -- particularly the Israeli-Arab community -- into the political system.

¶2. (U) As part of these efforts, the Ambassador and staff meet regularly with civil society leaders and human rights activists seeking equal treatment for Israel's minorities. In recent months, the Ambassador has met with leading figures such as Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Imam Yahya Hendi, and Martin Luther King III to support their efforts to promote peace and democracy through multicultural and interfaith dialogue. The Ambassador also hosts an annual Iftar dinner attended by many of the country's leading activists and Arab community leaders, and regularly includes human rights, peace, and interfaith activists in other Embassy-sponsored events. The promotion of human rights -- in Israel and internationally -- is a major theme in the Ambassador's widely-covered public speaking events.

¶3. (U) The Ambassador and staff from the Pol, PD and Econ sections maintain good relations with all of Israel's well-established human rights NGOs, from those working to advance the rights of specific groups (e.g. Arab, Bedouin, Ethiopian, non-Orthodox Jewish, etc.) to those active across the spectrum of human rights advocacy, such as the ACLU-like Association for Civil Rights in Israel. We support the work of many of these NGOs with Embassy, PD or MEPI funds:

-- Active MEPI grants to Israel's Arab community include a project to increase Arab-sector representation on the boards of government-owned corporations and another to strengthen leadership and encourage political participation at the municipal level.

-- Our ACCESS micro-scholarship program that provides supplemental English-language training to Israeli-Arab students contributed this year to a significant increase in the college entrance exam scores of program graduates, more of whom are attending university and establishing the civic and financial foundations for meaningful participation in Israeli democracy.

-- Speakers participating in PD programs frequently address

issues relating to defending the rights of minorities in democratic countries. For example, earlier in the year Harvard Law School Professor Charles Ogletree and University of Rhode Island Professor Bernard LaFayette made separate visits to Israel to address the political empowerment of minorities and the effective use of democracy to advance minority rights.

¶4. (U) The three "American Corner" libraries that Post's PD Section maintains in Beersheva, Karmiel and Yaffo offer a unique venue for outreach to Israel's minority communities. We often use these locations to conduct activities that promote civil rights and minority empowerment in communities where the needs are greatest. Programs at the Corners include DVCs for select audiences and presentations by Embassy officers and guest speakers on such topics as African-American history, women's empowerment, and legal issues in civil rights.

¶5. (C) Because of its open political system and laws which encourage Jewish immigration, Israel has a tradition of welcoming Jewish dissidents from other countries, particularly in the Former Soviet Union. Human rights activist and former Soviet political prisoner Natan Sharanski found a haven here, as did many who came after him. As part of his work with the large Russian immigrant community in Israel, the Embassy's Human Rights Reporting Officer meets regularly with exiled Russian dissidents active in the "Other Russia" coalition.

Israeli Priorities  
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¶6. (U) At a strategic level, the GOI's democracy and human rights priorities are geared toward defending against what it views as anti-Israel bias in international human rights fora. The GOI is also outspoken in its criticism of international NGOs that it considers "politicized," such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. The GOI accuses such NGOs of failing to fully reflect the security context of alleged human rights violations or of failing to adequately represent Israeli views on contentious issues such as the treatment of Palestinian detainees or the conduct of IDF forces during the 2006 war in Lebanon.

¶7. (U) Domestically, the GOI engages with a range of civil society organizations, in a manner generally commensurate with other democracies. The GOI provides partial funding to registered NGOs and often relies on their expertise to conduct human rights training for law enforcement personnel and security forces. GOI officials from the Prime Minister down engage with civil society, and speak regularly about the need to narrow the gap between Israel's Jewish and Arab citizens (although government funding often falls short of rhetoric). Israeli NGOs are also included in Knesset (parliament) debates on a wide range of topics, and are generally invited to testify in Knesset hearings on issues relating to human rights and civil liberties.

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